

CLIMATE CHANGE COP-OUT, p10 • PUPPETS & POLITICS, p17

THE INDYPENDENT

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A FREE PAPER FOR FREE PEOPLE



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Bloomberg farewell coverage starts p4

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The Independent is a New York-based free newspaper published 13 times a year on Mondays for our print and online audience of more than 100,000 readers. It is produced by a network of volunteers who report, write, edit, draw, design, take photos, distribute, fundraise and provide website management. Since 2000, more than 700 journalists, artists and media activists have participated in this project. Winner of more than 50 New York Community Media Alliance awards, *The Independent* is funded by subscriptions, reader donations, merchandise sales, benefits and advertising. We accept submissions that look at news and culture through a critical lens, exploring how systems of power — economic, political and social — affect the lives of people locally and globally. *The Independent* reserves the right to edit articles for length, content and clarity.

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INDY NEWS

BROOKLYN, HERE WE COME

An Indy is about to grow in Brooklyn.

After being based in Manhattan since it was launched 13 years ago, *The Independent* is moving across the East River to downtown Brooklyn. New York's leading radical newspaper will be housed in the Brooklyn Commons at 388 Atlantic Avenue starting January 1, 2014.

"This is a great opportunity for the paper to continue flourishing," said Alina Mogilyanskaya, *The Independent's* managing editor and coordinator. "Brooklyn is the place to be," added Mogilyanskaya, who immigrated to the borough when she was 6 years old.

Located in a former factory space, the Brooklyn Commons has emerged as a key social movement center in New York City during the past couple of years. The Commons has an event space, offices, classrooms and a rooftop garden. It is currently home to WBAI-99.5 FM, the Brecht Forum, the Right to the City Alliance and Families United for Racial and Economic Equality (FUREE). *The Independent* will be joined in its new office by its sister publication *IndyKids*, a newspaper and website for children ages 8-12.



Alina Mogilyanskaya

"To have all these organizations that are doing all this good work in one place is very significant," said Matt Birkhold, the executive director of the Brecht Forum, a cultural and educational center for people working for social justice. "And we're ecstatic at the prospect of being in close contact with a paper that contributes so much in terms of critical thought and sharing news of happenings around the city."

Brecht moved from its longtime home in the West Village to the Brooklyn Commons at the beginning of October. Birkhold said the move has brought his organization closer to the social conflicts roiling a rapidly gentrifying Brooklyn. At the same time, he noted, the Commons is accessible to New Yorkers from across the city due to its proximity to the Atlantic Terminal transit hub and several other nearby subway stations.

"It's incredible," Birkhold said. "We are within four blocks of almost every train in the city."

The Independent will host an open house for the paper's supporters in January on a date still to be determined. It is also looking to host more workshops and public events at the Commons in 2014. "We're going to publish an excellent newspaper and have a good time doing it," Mogilyanskaya

said. "That's the way it ought to be."

To find out the latest from the Indy, see independent.org, facebook.com/TheIndependent or @TheIndependent.

— JOHN TARLETON

INDY CO-FOUNDER TO RETURN

John Tarleton, one of *The Independent's* founders, will return in February 2014 as Co-Editor. He will be teaming up with Alina Mogilyanskaya, the paper's other full-time staffer.

Tarleton served as a writer, editor and lead coordinator at *The Independent* from 2001-2009. Most recently, he has worked as the associate editor of *Clarion*, the newspaper of the Professional Staff Congress, a progressive union local that represents 25,000 faculty and professional staff at the City University of New York.

"It's an exciting time to return," Tarleton said. "Clearly there's a deep hunger for real and fundamental change here in New York City and around the world. And the Indy is uniquely positioned to give voice to that."

"John's energy is infectious and seemingly limitless," said Ellen Davidson, a member of the paper's board of directors who held several top positions at the (U.S.) *Guardian* radical newsweekly from 1979 to 1990. "With his return and our new location at the Brooklyn Commons where we will be



John Tarleton

merous community and labor journalism awards over the past decade. During his previous stint at *The Independent*, Tarleton trained hundreds of aspiring reporters and guided a volunteer staff that garnered more than 40 awards from the New

situated among a thriving and creative activist community, I believe the Indy is poised to break through to a new level."

Tarleton has won nu-

York Community Media Alliance. Journalists that Tarleton helped mentor have gone on to work at a number of alternative and mainstream media outlets, from *AlterNet*, *Mother Jones* and *Democracy Now!* to *AM New York*, the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times*.

"I had my first published article in a real newspaper — and John is the reason why," recalled Alex Kane, an assistant editor at *Mondoweiss* and world editor at *AlterNet*. "My first try at journalism was a mess, but John kept at it, edited the hell out of my piece and taught me how to write well."

Tarleton has stayed involved with the *The Independent* since 2009 as a contributing editor and as a member of the newspaper's board of directors. He and Mogilyanskaya are planning to expand the Indy's new reporter training program and strengthen its on-the-ground coverage of New York while continuing the paper's strong international coverage. Creating more opportunities for interaction between the paper's readers and staff is another top priority.

"We don't have any corporate backing," he noted. "This paper exists to serve its readers. And it's their interest and their support that will make it possible for us to do great work."

— INDEPENDENT STAFF

PEDAL POWER

What's the most environmentally sustainable way to distribute a newspaper?

This past autumn *The Independent* took a step toward greater sustainability and made our distribution — the crucial process of getting copies of the paper into community and activist centers, libraries, bookshops, cafés and other spots all over New York City — 100 percent carbon and

fossil-fuel free.

The magic is in the bicycles. The Indy's teaming up with the NYC Cargo Bike Collective, a Brooklyn-based, worker-run business of politically-



The CBC's Yotam Sayer pedaling dozens of Indy bundles on his cargo bike.

minded, strong-willed and — yes, iron-legged bikers who do deliveries around the city. Their mission is to promote cargo bikes and one day have them replace cars altogether. Every month, the bike operators pick up pa-

pers from the Indy's printers in Long Island City, Queens and pedal thousands of copies to the far corners of the city, over the Williamsburg Bridge and even as far as Yankee Stadium in the Bronx.

"The best part of the Indy job is at the printers, loading up, because of course there's no other cargo bikes, there are cargo vans and trucks," said Rachel Schneider. She's a CBC operator and anointed illustrator (check out that pedaling Santa

Continued on page 12

A New Day for New York?

PHOTOS BY TIMOTHY KRAUSE
TEXT BY INDEPENDENT STAFF

Bill de Blasio’s emphasis on a “Tale of Two Cities” tapped into frustrations felt by New Yorkers, and they responded by propelling him to a landslide win in the mayoral race. On December 4 and 5, labor, community and Occupy groups took to the streets to highlight the need to take action against inequality and to insist that the mayor-elect follow through on commitments he made during his campaign.



▲ **CAN’T SURVIVE ON \$7.25:** Members of Fast Food Forward and their supporters march on December 5 to a rally for low-wage workers that drew about 1,000 people. Fast food workers from more than 100 cities including New York went on strike that day to demand a \$15 per hour wage and the right to form a union.



► **SHINE A LIGHT:** A participant in the December 5 rally at Foley Square lights a candle. Some of the candles were used to spell out “One NYC For All Of Us.”



▲ **BANK ON IT:** On December 4, protesters including a man (above) with an accordion visited the Midtown offices of several prominent Wall Street banks. A recently released report by the New Day New York Coalition argues that the city should recoup \$725 million a year in unnecessary fees and expenses it currently pays out to Wall Street.



◀ **OCCUPY THE FUTURE:** Food-service workers march on December 5. The final march of the day was from Foley Square to Zuccotti Park, birthplace of Occupy Wall Street. OWS’s ability to change the discourse in the U.S. around issues of inequality and the concentration of wealth has been credited by many observers with fueling Bill de Blasio’s upset victory in the mayor’s race.

Rethinking the Luxury City

BY TOM ANGOTTI

What will Bill de Blasio do? That question is churning around in the local press and on everyone's mind. Will he be a true progressive or just an enlightened pragmatist? Who will he appoint to key positions? Will he be aggressive in the pursuit of equality or stumble on the obstacles in his path? Will he stick by labor once he's on the other side of the bargaining table? Beyond the imaging and the hype, will he be that much different from Bloomberg? Or as an article in *Capital* put it, will de Blasio prove to be "an operative or activist"?

Interesting questions, but they're not the right ones.

The media and political establishment would have us believe that what really matters is the person in the top executive post. We are reminded that there are real obstacles in de Blasio's way — budget realities, the governor and legislature in Albany, the web of legal roadblocks, the sluggishness of the city's sprawling bureaucracy and Bloomberg's commitments for megaprojects and contracting out that will be hard to reverse. But what's really important, they seem to say, is whether de Blasio stands tall.

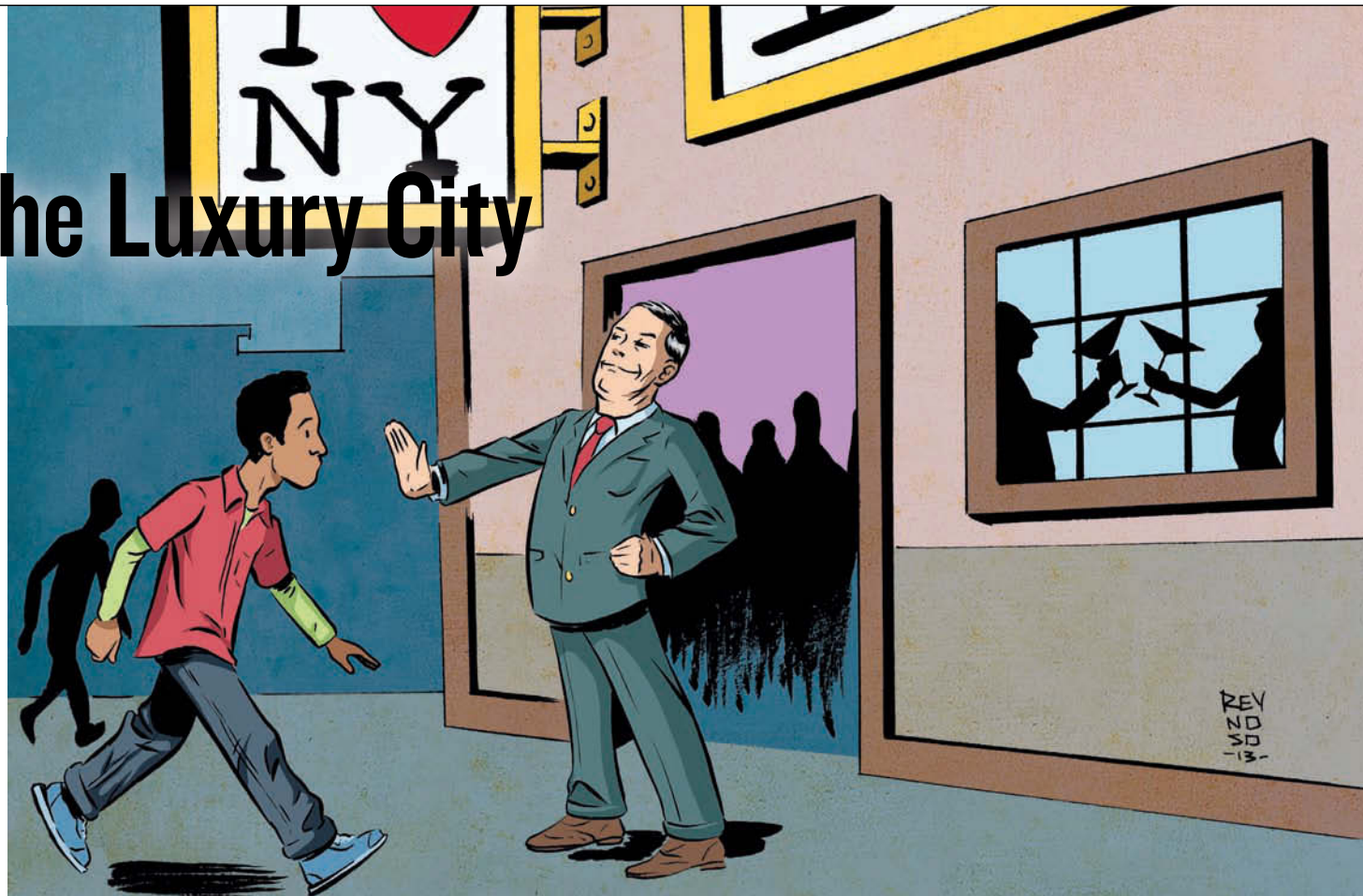
What this does is reduce local politics to a personality contest involving heroic figures. Missing in the picture: us, the working people, our neighborhoods and our community and labor organizations. The questions we should be asking now revolve around our role over the next four years. What should we do? The Bloomberg administration, one of the most imperial mayoralties in recent history, has created an illusion that the change in emperor is what really matters most.

THE BLOOMBERG LEGACY

Before we get to what does matter, we need to have a better understanding of Bloomberg's legacy, how it has changed the city, and what that will mean for the next four years.

In 12 years as mayor, billionaire Michael Bloomberg was a champion of building the luxury city. He explicitly advocated attracting big real estate investments and wealthy individuals with the idea that more capital would bring jobs, services and money for everyone else — in other words, good old trickle-down economics. He was also intolerant of anyone who suggested that this ignored the critical needs of people struggling with wages below the poverty level, unaffordable housing and declining public services.

The press, led by the three major daily newspapers and major network and cable news channels, pumped up Bloomberg's image, calling him extremely popular, a paragon of efficient government, a global leader in public health and the environment, and incorruptible. He benefited from a welling up of civic pride following 9/11 and from widespread relief that he



FRANK REYNOSO

turned away from former mayor Rudolph Giuliani's racial and political intolerance. But Bloomberg's halo didn't get tarnished until the remarkable landslide for de Blasio, who ran against Bloomberg's legacy of "the tale of two cities." De Blasio clearly struck a chord in an electorate that had not bought the hype about Mike.

What Bloomberg actually did could not be farther from the public image created in City Hall and on Madison Avenue. To build the luxury city, he rezoned around a third of the land in the city, creating huge increases in land value that owners cashed in on by building mostly luxury housing and office space. While the rezonings also protected middle- and upper-income enclaves from new development, thereby gaining a measure of consent, their main impact was to spur gentrification and the displacement of lower-income working people and locally owned businesses. At the same time, Bloomberg gen-

high that most people living in gentrifying neighborhoods could not afford them. Or that only a handful of developers opted for the 20 percent affordable units.

Bloomberg used his last term in office to cement his "legacy" by getting approvals and signing contracts for new development schemes that the next mayor will have a hard time reversing or slowing down. He contracted out many services, from public housing maintenance to the city's own strategic planning, undermining city agency workers, and balanced the budget without negotiating expired labor contracts or setting aside a penny for pay increases once the contracts are settled. In a scandal that none of the newspapers has dared to approach, Bloomberg ran his private charity out of City Hall to shape city policies in ways he would not be allowed to under the City Charter. And his much-heralded reputation for efficiency conceals some pretty big conflicts of interest and scandals, like the one around the CityTime contract. He widened the huge well of discontent with the distance of government from the neighborhoods, which was clearly reflected in the results of the

ment and recycling.

LESSONS FROM THE DINKINS ADMINISTRATION

Will the next administration be able to stop Bloomberg's luxury city? To help answer this question, let's look at the last time grassroots movements helped elect a mayor. David Dinkins, the city's first African-American mayor, was elected in 1990, following 12 years of Ed Koch, a law-and-order politician who was not popular in communities of color or with labor.

Dinkins welcomed progressives into his administration (including de Blasio), but from the first day he entered office Dinkins faced a backlash in the press and the most reactionary outposts within government, especially from within the police department. This opened the door for the revanchist putsch of Rudolph Giuliani, who exploited racial confrontation in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, joined racist cops demonstrating against community policing and went on to win the next election. The progressives, dispersed and disarmed, were unable to stop Giuliani and advance their social agenda.

De Blasio is not likely to face a similar backlash. He will replace Bloomberg's all-white City Hall with a more diverse staff in a city in which U.S.-born whites are a minority. Bloomberg has effectively lost on stop-and-frisk and many even in the NYPD are relieved. But the new mayor will face a host of other obstacles.

THE PERMANENT ESTABLISHMENT

Even without a backlash, the formidable army of lobbyists working for Wall Street and the real estate industry will already know where the levers of power are and how to pull them to get to de Blasio. They are going to do all in their power to insure that their greatest achievements under Bloomberg will be sustained. And de Blasio has been careful to not provoke them.

The first item on their agenda is to preserve the real estate boom that Bloomberg presided over. On this score, de Blasio has already declared no contest. In the City Council and as public advocate, he firmly supported new development as long as it included some measure of affordable housing. The problem is that under Bloomberg new development displaced more affordable housing than it created. De Blasio

THE MAIN IMPACT OF BLOOMBERG'S REZONINGS WAS TO SPUR GENTRIFICATION AND THE DISPLACEMENT OF LOWER-INCOME WORKING PEOPLE AND LOCALLY OWNED BUSINESSES.

erously offered subsidies and tax breaks to real estate developers. He focused on the biggest real estate plums in Manhattan, like the Hudson Yards, but also targeted downtown Brooklyn, Long Island City and other locations in the outer boroughs — places like Williamsburg, Brooklyn — which in a half decade began to look more like Manhattan than historic industrial, working-class neighborhoods.

Bloomberg dismissed charges that he was responsible for gentrification in Harlem, the Lower East Side and other development hot spots. He pointed to his program to create 165,000 units of affordable housing (mostly accomplished) and the use of inclusionary zoning in areas being rezoned, which created the possibility that 20 percent of new residential units would be affordable. Never mind that the definition of affordability was based on average annual income in the greater New York metropolitan area and was pegged so

last election.

Then we have Bloomberg's policing policies — the notorious stop-and-frisk that targeted black and Latino men. His housing policies brought over 50,000 people to homeless shelters, the highest number ever, and under his watch the number of people requiring food assistance went up dramatically while the already underestimated unemployment rate remained high.

Finally, Bloomberg's image as an advocate for all that is "green" and "healthy" does not square with the facts. His PlaNYC2030, presented as a long-term sustainability plan, is really a short-term growth plan to justify new real estate development and a few greening projects that help support it, and is not the first of its kind. While Bloomberg banned smoking, so too did mayors all over the United States and Europe. While some gains were made in fuel efficiency, New York is still far behind other cities in waste manage-

did not oppose the instant gentrification sparked by Bloomberg's 140 rezonings. He now promises only that the 20 percent affordable housing be required instead of optional. This means that 80 percent will continue to be luxury housing, which still drives up land values and rents and forces out existing residents. So de Blasio may give us more "affordable" housing, just like all the previous mayors did, fiddle with the percentages to get a little more of it, and do nothing to stop gentrification.

To his credit, de Blasio said he would not support some of Bloomberg's most egregious attacks on public and middle-income housing. For example, he said he would not approve the New York City Housing Authority's proposal to build luxury housing on the site of eight Manhattan projects.

However, he has not objected to the authority's other moves toward privatization and did not rule out coming up with different plans to build on authority land. Will de Blasio be the mayor to realize the dream of big real estate — to get their hands on public housing's most valuable land? In the midst of budget negotiations, will our next mayor cave before those who argue that selling off these and other public assets is the best way out?

One small indication of where the new mayor might go is his proposal to tax vacant land to encourage housing development. This evades any role for the people who live in areas that have been plagued with vacant lots as dumping grounds. They should have a say. Maybe they would prefer parks or community gardens to new housing? Taxing the land might be a good solution for developers and help fuel gentrification. Is that a progressive solution?

The second big item on the business agenda will be the budget and negotiations with unions. Here the 1% only has to let de Blasio take the hit for extracting concessions from his union supporters and for cutting funds for vital services. Let de Blasio be the one to convince workers to be "realistic" and accept the inevitable. What we will not hear about is that the city's billionaire bondholders, Wall Street firms and powerful real estate investors will not be asked to share the pain. The mayor will try to raise taxes, but even if he were to succeed in Albany it would not be enough.

BUILD THE DREAM

Bill de Blasio's history as a Democratic Party operative and pragmatist and his support for development must be understood along with his progressive credentials and outspoken criticism of inequality. But with the election behind him, who will put the brakes on the pragmatist?

The most important thing we can do now is to sustain and build independent

voices outside City Hall and not depend on the insiders. Here's an agenda to start with, but there's certainly much more:

- We won on stop-and-frisk; now let's restore community policing.
- We slowed down the creation of new charter schools; now let's stop subsidizing them, remake the Department of Education with professional educators and establish functioning parent councils.
- Bloomberg built a lot of "affordable housing" but too much of it isn't truly affordable and a lot of it contributes to gentrification and displacement of our neighborhoods. Let's preserve existing affordable housing by backing stronger rent laws, stopping the privatization of Mitchell-Lama (middle-income) and public housing and preserving affordable housing in land trusts.
- Bloomberg built many bike lanes, public plazas and the High Line. Now let's reduce traffic everywhere and bring these public benefits to all neighborhoods.

- After Sandy, Bloomberg changed the building and zoning laws to protect new buildings on the waterfront. Now let's have a new waterfront plan that will prevent our most vulnerable land from becoming exclusive upscale enclaves, and let's support working-class tenants and homeowners stuck in flood plains.

- Let's bolster the city's 59 community boards by drastically increasing their power, funding and ability to plan while also making them more representative.
- Let's submit the city's capital budget to the participatory budgeting process.

Yes, of course, we have organizations and individuals that will represent us, lobby the mayor and stick up for our interests. Some will get into City Hall with de Blasio and advocate worthy causes. But without active, vocal movements pressing from the grassroots, don't expect a lot from the new administration.

Tom Angotti is a professor of urban affairs and planning at the City University of New York, co-editor of Progressive Planning Magazine and author of New York For Sale: Community Planning Confronts Global Real Estate.

**THE MOST IMPORTANT
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IS TO SUSTAIN AND BUILD
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OUTSIDE CITY HALL AND
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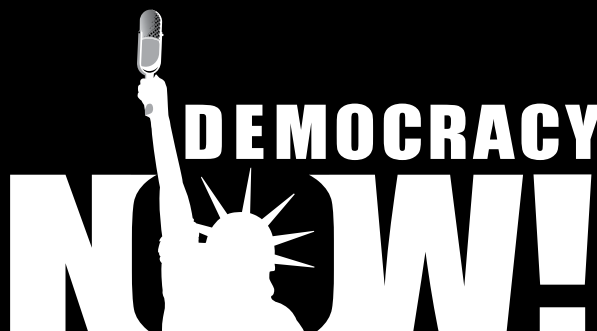
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Grading the Education Mayor

BY LEONIE HAIMSON

When the law was changed in 2002 to give Michael Bloomberg complete control over the public school system and its 1.1 million students, he urged the public to judge his success or failure as mayor based on his handling of education issues.

Since then, we have had 12 long years of an autocratic, technocratic and test-driven regime in which decisions have been made by the mayor with little respect shown for the views of parents or teachers in the city's public school system. Teachers have been rated, students held back and schools closed primarily on the basis of test scores — narrow and essentially unreliable measures — and the result has been profound demoralization, a narrowing of the curriculum and a sense of despair.

For a while, Bloomberg's popularity coasted on inflated state test scores and rising school budgets. But when the he started cutting back on school budgets in 2007 and the state test score bubble burst in 2010, his approval ratings on education sank like a stone.

When budgets and test scores began to decline, Bloomberg had nothing to arrest his reputation's fall from grace, given his imperious manner and the way in which he and his hand-picked chancellors had ruthlessly closed schools, caused more overcrowding by co-locating newly opened schools into existing buildings and openly condescended to anyone who expressed a different opinion. In 2011, in response to parents who protested the mass closure of schools, Bloomberg said, "Unfortunately there are some parents who ... never had a formal education, and they don't understand the value of education."

INCREASING CLASS SIZE

The administration has also revealed its contempt for parents' views on the issue of class size. For the past six years, as part of its "Learning Environment Surveys," the Department of Education (DOE) has asked parents what improvements they would like to see in their children's schools. Every year, smaller classes have led their list of priorities. Yet every year, class sizes have increased — a clear sign that despite Bloomberg's rhetoric, parent "choice" was not taken seriously. In 2011, Bloomberg even said that if he had his way, he would double class size — and that would be "a good deal for the students."

This fall, class sizes in the early grades are the largest they've been in 15 years. This has occurred despite a promise from Bloomberg when he first ran for office in 2001 that he would reduce class size. It also happened de-

spite the fact that in 2003, New York's highest court found that the city's children had been deprived of the right to an adequate education guaranteed by the state constitution in large part because of excessive class sizes.

These class size increases also come despite a state law passed in the spring of 2007 that sent billions in additional aid to high-needs school districts in New York City and other locales that could be spent in six approved areas, including class size reduction. Yet at the same time the state was increasing its funding, Bloomberg began slashing school budgets — amounting to about 15 percent since 2007 — which has led to a loss of more than 5,000 teachers, many of them veteran educators with many years of experience. This, combined with increased enrollment, has led directly to larger classes.

There are also specific policy decisions that the Bloomberg administration has

with 30 or more children in these grades.

- In 2012, principals were told that they had to accommodate students with special needs in classes up to the contractual maximum in regular general education classes; those limits are 32 students per class in grades 1-5, 31 students in grades 6-8 and 34 students in high school.

Though in theory, integrating students with disabilities into regular classes is a positive development, there is little chance that these students will succeed in large classes. The research is crystal clear that all students benefit from small classes; but those who benefit the most are those most at risk: poor, minority and special needs children and English language learners.

This is why class size reduction has been

dollars on technologies, including a student data system called ARIS that cost \$80 million and is rarely used. The DOE has also spent considerable funds on software for online instruction. Though this method of instruction has been misleadingly called "personalized" learning, it is really depersonalized learning, with computers replacing students' real-life interactions with teachers.

The most egregious example of this phenomenon is the city and state plan to share personal student data, including highly sensitive health and disciplinary information, with a corporation called inBloom Inc. inBloom was created with \$100 million by the Gates Foundation, and was designed to encourage a thriving market for private vendors who would produce data-mining software. inBloom has an operating system built by Wireless Generation, a subsidiary of Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation, which is its largest subcontractor. Wireless, also known as Am-

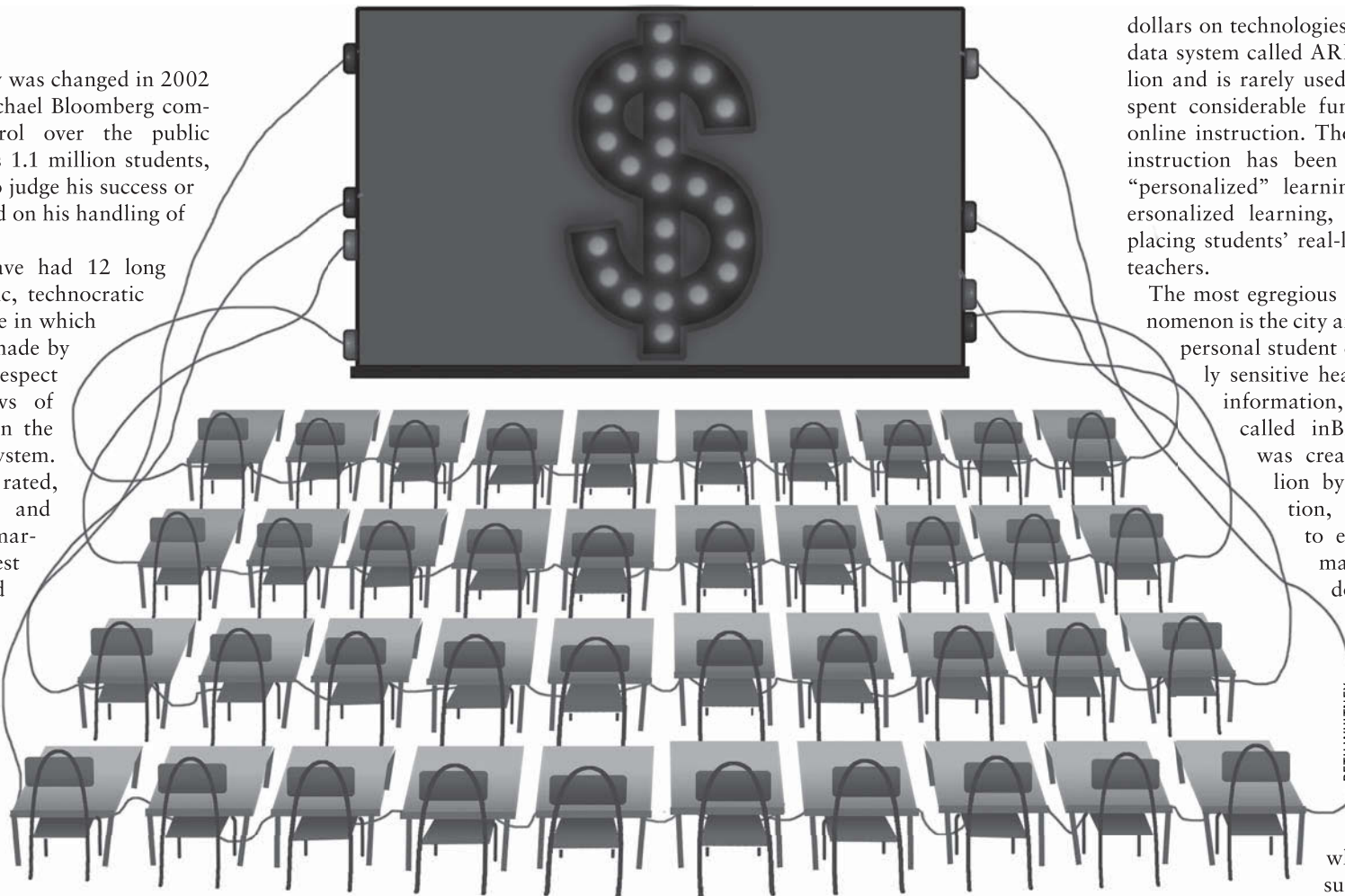
plify, is run by Joel Klein, the former New York City schools chancellor, and the chief product officer of inBloom, a woman named Sharren Bates, used to work for the DOE in charge of the ARIS project.

Though nine states originally planned to partner with inBloom, eight have now pulled out after protests by parents concerned about their children's privacy — all except New York. And while Mayor-elect Bill de Blasio has promised to pull New York City student data out of inBloom as soon as possible, the State Education Department says it will not allow any districts to opt out of the system.

Indeed, even as we have a new mayor who promises a new direction for our schools, our students are being subjected to an increasingly dictatorial and prescriptive State Education Department, intent on replicating the worst policies of the Bloomberg administration by focusing on test scores, data collection and digitizing instruction to the detriment of real education.

How will our new mayor operate under the state's oppressive education policies? Will de Blasio fight back and follow through with his promises to reduce class size and deliver the city's students from excessive testing and data collection? That remains unclear for now. But whether or not de Blasio keeps his commitments, parents, teachers and their allies will continue to advocate the education our children deserve.

Leonie Haimson is the executive director of Class Size Matters and a board member of the national organization Network for Public Education. She was a New York City public school parent for 15 years.



BETH WHITNEY

PARENTS WANT SMALLER CLASSES. YET EVERY YEAR, CLASS SIZES HAVE INCREASED.

made that contributed to rising class sizes:

- The administration removed any class size standards from the instructional footprint that helps determine where to co-locate schools, leading to the loss of classroom space needed to keep class sizes small.
- In 2010, the DOE eliminated a program that provided targeted funding to keep class sizes to 20 students or less in grades K-3 — despite a promise to the state to maintain it.
- In 2011, the DOE decided to stop honoring a side agreement with the teachers union to cap class sizes in grades 1-3 at 28 students, leading to a tripling of classes

shown to be so effective at narrowing the achievement gap between racial and ethnic groups. Smaller classes not only allow teachers more time to give individualized attention but also result in students becoming more engaged and focused in their classwork. With personal feedback from their teachers, non-cognitive skills including persistence are strengthened.

PRODUCING "RESULTS"

At the same time as there has been more pressure than ever on teachers and students to produce "results" in the form of higher test scores, there has been a disinvestment in the classroom and a push instead to privatize services through online learning and the expansion of charter schools.

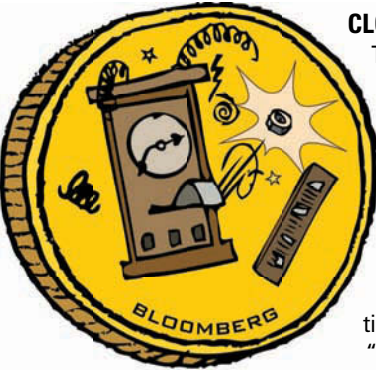
The city has spent hundreds of millions of

Bloomberg's Boondoggles

By John Tarleton

Michael Bloomberg — he may be arrogant and annoying, but he’s a one-of-a-kind manager who brought a businessman’s practicality and dedication to efficiency to city government. That’s what we have been told since he took office. But, was it ever really true? Whether it was the disastrous appointment of Cathie Black as city schools chancellor, his failure to organize a response to (or even show up for) the December 2010 blizzard or the

CityTime scandal, Bloomberg often seemed to veer between being inept and being out of touch, adept only at showering favors on his fellow elites. For someone who carefully cultivated his post-partisan bonafides, he could be a fierce ideologue for private sector solutions that frequently degenerated into farce. In the end, one skill Bloomberg brought from the corporate world that served him well was a flair for public relations and managing his own image. Below are three “Bloomdoggles” that capture the spirit of his reign. There were many more like them.



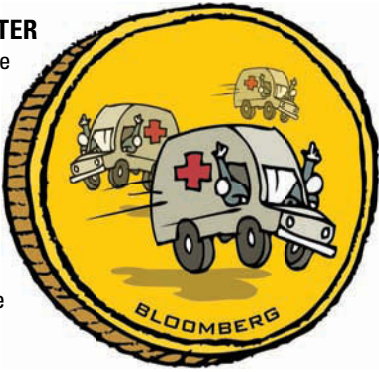
CLOCKED BY CITYTIME

The poster child of all Bloomberg-era scandals, CityTime began in 1998 as a five-year, \$63 million initiative to computerize timekeeping for 165,000 city employees. The idea was to thwart civil servants who might wish to pad their pay with hours they did not work. Unfortunately, the private contractors who worked on CityTime did not receive the same scrutiny from the Bloomberg administration. Instead, they were allowed to run up the cost of the project to more than \$700 million while its completion fell years behind schedule. In 2010, new city comptroller John Liu began to investigate and call attention to the CityTime cost overruns. Federal indictments followed for 11 contractors and consultants who had set up a complex web of kickbacks. Prosecutors identified a 2006 decision by the Bloomberg administration to accept responsibility for any cost overruns on the project as a key moment when the fraud dramatically expanded. The city might have had a better chance of detecting the scam if it had not outsourced quality-assurance over the CityTime contract to yet another private contractor, Spherion, which was also in on the fraud. Speaking to reporters in 2011, Bloomberg tried to absolve his administration for its role in the CityTime fiasco. “I don’t know of any big software project that doesn’t have lots of problems,” he said.

The Bloomberg administration’s botched rollout of the city’s new 911 emergency response system has not gained the same notoriety as the CityTime scandal, but the consequences have been at least as serious. Launched in 2005 as a top priority of the administration, the \$1.3 billion Emergency Response Transformation Project was supposed to bring New York City’s emergency response system into the 21st century. Instead, it came in \$700 million over budget and actually resulted in slower response times.

Problems with the new system have been legion and included getting fire and EMS calls from 911 operators to first responders in the field. More than lost money, the faltering system may be responsible for lost lives. Last July, the *New York Daily News’s* Juan Gonzalez reported that the faulty dispatch system may have contributed to the death of 4-year-old Ariel Russo, who was struck on a sidewalk by an SUV. It took 4 minutes and 18 seconds from the time of the first request for an ambulance from police at the scene to a 911 operator until the time an ambulance was finally dispatched to assist the still semi-conscious child. Russo died later the same day.

WHEN SECONDS REALLY MATTER



GARY MARTIN



THE \$2.4 BILLION SUBWAY STOP

Bloomberg’s dream of building an Olympic stadium at Hudson Yards flamed out in 2005. But his obsession with turning this swath of Far West Side real estate into a shimmering enclave for the super-rich remains unabated. To that end, the city has taken the unusual step of shelling out the full cost of extending the 7 train from its current Times Square terminus to 11th Avenue and 34th Street. The extension was originally supposed to cost \$2.1 billion and have a second stop at 10th Avenue and 41st Street. However, the stop was dropped in 2007 once cost overruns began to pile up. The 7 train extension will now have one stop, at a projected cost of \$2.4 billion. Under the “value capture” financing strategy advanced by the Bloomberg administration, the additional revenues and fees obtained from the development of Hudson Yards are supposed to cover the \$3 billion in infrastructure bonds that have been issued, mostly to pay for the cost of the subway extension. However, an April 2013 report by the Independent Budget Office revealed that 2012 revenues for Hudson Yards were off by more than \$100 million from their projected levels. The IBO also reported that since 2006, \$374 million in public moneys had been diverted to the Hudson Yards Infrastructure Corporation, in part to ensure that interest payments were made on its bonds.



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What is 'Constitutional' Stop-and-Frisk?

BY ANN SCHNEIDER

During his mayoral bid, Bill de Blasio presented himself as “the only candidate to end the stop-and-frisk era that targets minorities.” His opposition to stop-and-frisk became a defining feature of his campaign, and his multiracial family and his teenage son’s now-legendary afro did much to bolster the image de Blasio was trying to construct: that of a progressive populist for a diverse New York. Needless to say, he overwhelmingly won the African-American and Latino vote.

But after emerging victorious from the election, he added a qualifier to his tune: the goal de Blasio now talks about is ending “unconstitutional” stop-and-frisk. The number of stop-and-frisks occurring on the streets of New York has already dropped sharply in the past year, but de Blasio is inheriting a city that is scarred by the aggressive policing of the Bloomberg administration. So when the mayor-elect tapped William Bratton as his police commissioner on December 5, many stop-and-frisk opponents reacted

warily and some expressed vocal opposition. Bratton served as New York’s top cop from 1994 to 1996 under Rudolph Giuliani; during that time, he implemented the “zero tolerance” policing tactics that paved the way for the stop-and-frisk abuses of the Bloomberg/Kelly years.

Much like his new boss, Bratton has come out in favor of making sure that stop-and-frisk is carried out constitutionally. But he has also called the tactic “an essential tool of policing,” and prophesized that “you do away with it, and your cities are overrun with crime.” Between 2002 and

2008, during Bratton’s stint as LAPD commissioner, the annual number of pedestrian stops nearly doubled; meanwhile, the annual number of both pedestrian and motor vehicle stops jumped by 49 percent, from 587,200 to 875,204.

“It’s like asking an arsonist to help you put out fires. You don’t ask the person who is the architect of racial profiling, stop-and-

frisk to come back and not put a stop to it,” declared outgoing East New York Councilmember Charles Barron at a press conference the day Bratton’s appointment was announced. He vowed to launch a grassroots campaign to oust the commissioner-designate.

Reactions from other opponents of stop-and-frisk have been more measured, with Brooklyn Councilmember Jumaane Williams stating that he is “cautiously optimis-

tic” about de Blasio’s choice and the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR) saying, “We hope Bratton’s appointment is not a signal from de Blasio that the NYPD will be ramping up so-called ‘broken windows’ policing, surveillance, and numbers-driven policing.”

After 12 years of Raymond Kelly at the helm of the NYPD, it may come as a balm to

WHAT THE COURTS HAVE SAID

In 1968, the U.S. Supreme Court handed down the landmark decision *Terry v. Ohio*, which permitted police to stop an individual based on a reasonable suspicion

that the suspect was involved in criminal conduct. In 1976, New York’s Court of Appeals, interpreting New York’s constitution, said police need a “reasonable, articulable suspicion” of criminality to justify a stop and frisk. This standard is short of “probable cause,” which is needed to justify an

THE LAST FEW DECADES HAVE SEEN STATE AND FEDERAL COURTS WEAKEN LIMITATIONS ON STOP-AND-FRISK.

Continued on page 15

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DECEMBER 14, 2012

NANCY HOCH

That morning
in Brooklyn
I heard
not on every station
just on one radio program
just in the middle
of one segment
sometime around 8:40
that a group of young people
had been blown up by a missile
fired from a U.S. drone.

How awful
I thought
to be just sitting
with your friends
in a park
on a summer's evening.

They are all dead.

That's all I know
so don't ask me
how many
their names or ages
what the first responders did or thought
where or when or who
or what the town went through.

The Catholic priest
speaking on the radio
had just returned
not from the town
where it happened
(how many months ago?)
but from the city of Kabul
where twenty-five young people
have dedicated themselves
to ending the killing.

They tell him
the drones
hover every other night
over the villages,

they sound
low, buzzing.

Why?

By noon that is what everyone in America wants to know.

In Connecticut,
State Trooper Vance says
the weapons
are being traced

back to the workbench
where they were being assembled,

says

we will put
every single resource
into this investigation.

But in Afghanistan,
everyone knows,
the drone will not be traced back
to the workbench where it was assembled,

to the National Guardsman or woman
inside a windowless room in Syracuse,
only 259 driving miles from Newtown,
less as the crow flies,

to the president,
who, by mid-afternoon,
has called a press conference
to say

they had their entire lives
ahead of them.



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OUR PLANET IN THE BALANCE

Inside the Warsaw Climate Talks

By RENÉE FELTZ

WARSAW, Poland — “Who rules Poland? The coal industry or the people?” was the question posed by a massive banner Greenpeace activists draped on the side of a drab office building in downtown Warsaw, not far from where the second week of the United Nations’ annual climate convention was just getting under way in mid-November. It was a reasonable question, given that Poland had decided its duties as host of an event where thousands of delegates from nearly 200 countries had come to forge a global agreement on

THE KYOTO PROTOCOL EXPLAINED

The Kyoto Protocol is an international treaty to reduce greenhouse gas emissions that went into effect in 1995. The treaty requires industrialized nations to collectively reduce their emissions of heat-trapping greenhouse gases by 5.2 percent from their 1990 levels, which would be the same as reducing emissions by 29 percent from 2010 levels.

The United States is a signatory to the treaty. However, it has never been approved by Congress and the U.S. is not required to meet any binding targets for reducing its emissions. Since Kyoto went into effect, worldwide greenhouse gas emissions have continued to rise. With the Kyoto agreement set to expire in 2015, the Obama administration is pushing for an even weaker agreement that would only set voluntary emissions targets for individual nations.

— INDYPENDENT STAFF

how to tackle climate change did not bar it from simultaneously hosting the annual meeting of the World Coal Association.

The answer was driven home inside the city’s hulking national stadium, where delegates huddled amid hundreds of corporate lobbyists. Some of them used “organic” pen and notebook sets provided by the Polish Energy Group (PGE), which operates two huge coal mines and about 40 coal-fired power plants — one of which is the largest source of CO₂ emissions in Europe. PGE was among 11 corporations invited to officially partner with the Polish government in presenting the event. They got privileged access in exchange for providing “substantial support” — and the greenwashing opportunity? Priceless.

As a member of the *Democracy Now!* production team that covered COP 19 in Warsaw both outside and wherever the media were allowed inside, I witnessed how this corporate mindset eroded an already weak agreement that is intended to succeed the 1995 Kyoto Protocol in two years (see sidebar).

During the first week of the summit Typhoon Haiyan blew ashore in the central Philippines, leveling swaths of the country with record-setting 200mph winds. Advocates for addressing climate change noted that warmer temperatures “load the dice” and make such extreme weather events more likely. But any sense of urgency this created in the negotiations to reduce global emissions of carbon dioxide (the main heat-trapping gas responsible for increasing worldwide temperatures) was squashed by representatives of the largest polluting nations.

After Naderev “Yeb” Saño, the Philippines’ lead climate negotiator, delivered an emotional speech to delegates, he was greeted by youth activists who held up a banner referring to fatalities from last year’s devastating Typhoon Bopha, which hit the Philippines as well. The banner read, “2012 Bopha 1,067; 2013 Haiyan 10,000+?” The head of the U.N. Climate

Convention, Christina Figueres of Costa Rica, responded by banning three of them from the rest of the talks.

As negotiators got back to work, they struggled to agree on how to limit the increase in global temperatures to 2 degrees Celsius (or 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) above the pre-industrial average, the tipping point at which scientists believe further temperature increases could become irreversible. When asked what a four-degree increase would look like for the Philippines, Saño said, “It would be catastrophic for my country. That means collapse of our ecosystems, massive droughts, more intense tropical cyclones. I just can’t imagine how we will secure our food sources and our water sources.”

REPARATIONS

The impacts of climate change will be unevenly distributed. It’s widely expected that developing nations in Africa, Asia and Latin America will suffer the greatest harm, even though it is wealthier developed nations that have poured most of the carbon emissions into the atmosphere since the Industrial Revolution began 200 years ago.

During COP 19, developing countries saw little accomplished on the key issue of “loss and damage” — recognition that the U.N. Climate Convention must provide a way to rebuild the lives destroyed by extreme weather. U.S. negotiators stuck to talking points in a leaked memo that reframed the issue as one of “blame and liability.” As lead U.S. envoy Todd Stern put it, “We don’t regard climate action as a matter of compensation or reparations or anything of the kind.”

Stern’s comments drew stern rebuttal from Tosi Mpanu Mpanu, former chair of the Africa Group in U.N. climate change negotiations. “Today Africans have to go through adverse effect of a global phenomenon that they didn’t create,” said Mpanu Mpanu, who is from the Democratic Republic of Congo. “It’s

was slapped by the Manhattan DA’s office with a slew of criminal charges that threatened to land him in jail for a year. The choir’s musical director Nehemiah Luckett was also charged and faced a year in jail.

Reverend Billy’s fans rallied to his support. An online petition calling for the charges against him and Luckett to be dropped has received more than 14,000 signatures. At a December 9 court hearing, the prosecution dropped the most serious charges, rioting in the second degree and menacing in the third degree. Upon further review, they informed the judge that the “riot” appeared to be a musical protest. They would now seek a plea bargain deal that would result in Reverend Billy and Luckett being sentenced to one day of community service on a single count of disorderly conduct.

Reverend Billy said he would continue to fight the case at his next court hearing on February 27. Meanwhile, he hasn’t stopped inveighing against JPMorgan Chase. His weekly Sunday afternoon performances at Joe’s Pub at the Public Theater near Astor Place end with a march up Lafayette Street to a nearby Chase bank outlet. On one recent Sunday a crowd of more than 60 people carrying aloft photos of the golden toad crammed into the bank’s front foyer. Beneath the blinking blue lights of the Chase ATM machines, they sang, “Humanity we surround you, imagination we have found you!”

“You get the sensation,” Reverend Billy later reflected, “that just be-



FIGHTING CORPORATE POWER: Members of Greenpeace drop a banner at the beginning of this year’s U.N. climate talks in Warsaw, Poland. Climate activists were stunned when the Polish government invited the World Coal Association to hold its annual gathering in Warsaw at the same time as the U.N. climate conference.

The World We Will Inherit

By ANJALI APPADURAI

WARSAW, Poland — On November 21, one of the final days of this year’s United Nations climate conference, more than 800 people walked out *en masse* from the conference venue. The group included representatives of developing countries, NGOs, businesses and youth, trade, farmers’ and women’s groups. Single file, forming an enormous line, we waited patiently to have our badges scanned by security. Our T-shirts read, “Polluters talk, we walk.” Security guards gaped and politicians paused as heads of giant organizations like Greenpeace and Oxfam, normally committed participants at U.N. conferences, marched silently along with hundreds of others, filling hallways and emptying meeting rooms. Some of us carried signs showing the red dot, the symbol of solidarity with the climate-impacted people of the Philippines, who were recently hit by the largest typhoon in recorded history. We left, and the conference was suddenly strangely quiet.

Young people have long been frustrated with the political response to climate change. As the science gives us increasingly dire warnings that we are running out of time before climate change becomes disastrous, we look to our leaders for some sign of movement — and consistently get nothing. Youth from all over the world gather each year at the U.N. climate talks, only to see endless political head-butting, meaningless speeches, useless fights and, eventually, empty texts containing no legal

requirements to take action. Those of us from rich nations watch our governments refuse to take responsibility for their massive carbon emissions; meanwhile, government representatives and ordinary people from developing countries assert again and again the fundamental, uncomfortable truth of the climate crisis: those who will be affected first and hardest by climate change are the world’s poor.

The bright spot at these conferences is meeting with other youth. Every year, several hundred of us from around the world gather at the U.N. talks to represent our various organizations and NGOs back home. We’ve become a sort of family, a gathering of close friends who see each other only once a year but keep in touch year-round. There are enthusiastic reunions, long talks over beers and even couples that pair off through these gatherings.

Most important, though, is the work we do together. Inside the conference, the youth play a number of roles; for instance, some of us organize actions or protests inside the conference halls. Creative expressions of frustration have become a ubiquitous feature of the U.N. — politicians either cringe or look forward to seeing events like “Fossil of the Day,” at which three “fossil awards” are sarcastically awarded to countries that have done the most to block progress each day, all accompanied gleefully by the Jurassic Park theme song. Other youth — for example, College of the Atlantic’s Earth in Brackets student group, where I started out — take on the role of “policy translators,” sitting



WARSAW PACT: Frustrated by the corporate domination of this year’s U.N. climate conference in Warsaw, Poland, youth activists from around the world walked out on the next-to-last day of talks.

through hours of painfully boring meetings, deciphering political documents and blogging and tweeting simplified versions. Others lobby politicians to consider future generations in their work, and yet others communicate through media or writing to the public back home. All of our work is meant to represent and strengthen the voice of the youth we represent in our home communities.

Though the youth often experience personal or cultural differences, most of us have a common vision for the future we want: safe societies, thriving ecosystems, tightly-knit communities and economies built for people’s needs

rather than the fossil fuel industry’s coffers. It would be a radically different world. Many delegates at the conference recognize this, and we form close relationships with some of them, like Yeb Saño of the Philippines.

But the U.N. process isn’t yielding results anywhere near what will help us achieve this vision. Carbon emissions continue to soar and the fossil fuel industry continues to be a powerful lobby in the political process. Many grassroots movements are already fiercely engaged in the climate struggle — be it through

Continued on page 15



EARTHALUJAH! Reverend Billy Talen prepares to enter a Chase bank lobby in NYC.

Honduras Under the Gun

BY NANCY ROMER

TEGUCIGALPA, Honduras — Supporters of left-leaning presidential candidate Xiomara Castro are claiming fraud after Honduran authorities declared on December 12 that her conservative rival Juan Orlando Hernandez has won the presidency. The two candidates campaigned on starkly different visions of how to govern this Central American nation of 8.5 million people.

According to the Honduran electoral tribunal (TSE), Orlando Hernandez of the ruling National Party won the election, which was held in late November, with 37 percent of the vote to Castro's 29 percent. The remainder of the vote was divided among a half dozen other candidates. Castro held a commanding lead in pre-election opinion polls and led by six points in exit polls conducted on the day of the vote.

Hundreds of supporters from LIBRE, Castro's political party, responded to the news by holding a sit-in at the TSE headquarters. Pointing to evidence of fraud, Castro's husband Manuel ("Mel") Zelaya said her supporters would not accept the results because the tribunal had failed to examine more than 3,600 precinct tallies.

Zelaya served as president of Honduras from 2006 to 2009 before being ousted from power in a military-backed coup. Considered by some as the "FDR of Honduras," Zelaya angered his fellow elites (and Washington) by responding to the demands of progressive social movements and taking the country to the left during his presidency — increasing the minimum wage, moving toward land reform and expanding social programs in a country where 71 percent of the population lives in extreme poverty. Under Zelaya, Honduras joined ALBA, the alliance of progressive Latin American nations that includes Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador and Cuba. At the time of the coup, Zelaya and his supporters were seeking public approval for convening a constituent assembly that would write a new constitu-

tion. He hoped to "refund" a country whose political system has traditionally been dominated by a handful of powerful families.

Zelaya returned from exile in 2011. He was barred from running in this year's presidential election. Instead, Castro ran in his place and emerged as a powerful political figure in her own right. Her candidacy has come at a time when the suffering of Honduras's poor majority has intensified.

Since 2009, the gains of the Zelaya years have been reversed. The poverty rate has increased by 13 percent and the extreme poverty rate by 26 percent, according to the Center for Economic and Policy Research. Violent crime is off the charts. Small-scale farmers and fisherfolk have been plagued by land grabs that deny them access to farmland and coastlines. This leaves them unable to feed themselves and their families. I visited Honduras during the first week of November as part of a food sovereignty delegation organized by Grassroots International and met with social movement leaders and farmers there who reported constant threats to their lives.

That same feeling of menace was thick in the air in the weeks leading up to the November 24 election day. Five LIBRE activists were murdered two days before the election. Military checkpoints and police round-ups increased in scope and frequency, especially in poor communities and toward activist groups. Our international delegation was repeatedly stopped at military checkpoints; for example, in a three-hour ride, our van

was stopped six times with demands to see passports and licenses. Long lines on highways resulting from waits at the many checkpoints were evidence of the government's muscle-flexing.

This smothering police presence could be a preview of what awaits Honduras in the next four years. Orlando Hernandez stumped on a law-and-order platform, promising to put a soldier on every street corner. Castro, on the other hand, advocated a community policing strategy to quell the tide of violence in Honduras. Orlando Hernandez stoked the fears of the Honduran people; Castro sought to address underlying social problems such as poverty, education and unemployment that exacerbate family and gang violence.

On election day, international observers from groups like the National Lawyers Guild and the Alliance for Global Justice witnessed operatives from the National Party draw on a bag of dirty tricks: attempted vote purchasing, purchasing of voter IDs, denying registered voters the chance to cast a ballot, altered tally sheets, voting by dead people or people who no longer live in Honduras and more. While some observers estimated that more than 20 percent of the

votes were in question, the U.S. ambassador quickly came out with a statement congratulating the Honduran authorities on their handling of the elections and the vote count.

Though Castro's failure to obtain the presidency is a bitter disappointment for her supporters, all is not lost. Her husband will enter Congress at the head of a 37-member LIBRE delegation. Many observers think it likely that LIBRE will coalesce with the Liberal Party (27) and the new Anti-Corruption Party (13) delegates and form a majority bloc in Congress. At the same time, the grassroots social movements that have propelled the resistance inside Honduras since the 2009 coup continue to organize and mobilize. Their goal remains the same: to transform their country from the bottom up as social movements have done in a number of other Latin American nations over the past decade.

Nancy Romer is professor of psychology at Brooklyn College and co-founder and chair of the Governance Board of the Brooklyn Food Coalition. She recently returned from a food sovereignty delegation in Honduras and Guatemala sponsored by Grassroots International.



DANGEROUS DISSENT: Xiomara Castro (center in white shirt and wide-brimmed hat) and her husband, Manuel Zelaya (to her right, also in wide-brimmed hat), ride with a coffin containing the body of a supporter who was killed protesting the results of November's presidential election.

PEDAL POWER

Continued from page 2

Claus on page 9). "The printers and the other people who are picking up newspapers out of that location are always really amazed at what we're doing."

So are we at the Indy. The CBC not only moves all our papers, but they'll also be distributing through the winter, and they've come up with an inspired way of bringing bundles from LIC to the scores of Indy spots in Manhattan. Call it "swarming": one hearty operator loads up a giant trailer — "the mothership" — with bundles and brings them over the Williamsburg Bridge (see Yotam Sayer on page 2). Then the other, lighter and faster operators pick up bundles, deliver them, and come back to the mothership for more. Repeat.

The CBC has a fleet of bikes, each one aptly or cheekily named — "DJ," "Freighty Cat," "Roxy," "Ice-Cream" (aka "Harvey Milk") and so on, a half-dozen full-time operators along with about a dozen ancillary members and ties to New York City's grassroots progressive and activist communities.

The CBC's members envision a more sustainable future and the collective's internal process is steeped with a familiarity

with consensus derived from Occupy Wall Street. "We don't want to see a world where capitalism and bureaucracy trump human need or the need of the earth to not be polluted," said Joe Sharkey, a CBC operator.

"We're here because we want to support activism," added Rebekah Schiller, also an operator. The collective helps with direct actions and events, including the recent Jeremy Hammond light and noise demo at NYC's Metropolitan Detention Center, the Brooklyn Free Store's Really Really Black Friday event, #S17, May Day and more. "We want to support community projects, and the way we make sure that happens is that we support ourselves through this delivery business."

And they can deliver just about anything: thousands of Indys, fridges, the entire contents of the Brooklyn Free Store, your compost...

You can learn more about the NYC Cargo Bike Collective at facebook.com/NYCCargoBikeCollective or @ReplaceCarsNYC.

— ALINA MOGILYANSKAYA



SPECIAL DELIVERY: NYC Cargo Bike Collective operators Rebekah Schiller, Yotam Sayer and Margo Gregory loading up at the print shop in Long Island City.

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Stop-and-Frisk

Continued from page 8

arrest.

But subsequent legal cases have carved out numerous exceptions to these bedrock principles, a process that has weakened them and given local police extremely wide latitude in deciding what constitutes suspicious behavior. Leaving it up to police officers and then to judges to decide whether behavior was “suspicious enough” is an entirely subjective standard; at the same time, it has meant that the crucial decisions were made on a case-by-case basis, out of context from the rest.

That is why CCR’s *Floyd v. City of New York* class-action lawsuit was so audacious and so necessary. No one else was working to show a pattern of discrimination. To prevail in showing that the NYPD’s stop-and-frisk policy was a violation of the Four-

teenth Amendment’s equal protection clause — that all people are guaranteed the same protection of and under the laws — they had to amass statistical evidence showing that racial minorities were disproportionately affected, that the stops didn’t help identify the true criminals and that the justifications cited by police were bogus. Besides the egregious examples that befell their named plaintiffs, they needed an expert witness to pull it all together to show a pattern of racialized suspicion.

An earlier CCR victory in the 2003 case of *Daniels v. City of New York* led to a requirement that police officers keep records of each stop. The form used by the NYPD, the UF-250, required only that the officer check off a box indicating the reason for it. The choices were “furtive movements,” “fits the description,” “casing a location,” “acting as a lookout,” “evasive response,” “suspicious bulge,” “high crime area” and

“other.”

Columbia law professor Jeffrey Fagan conducted a review of these forms and, accepting the officers’ word at face value, was able to classify the stops as “apparently justified,” “apparently unjustified,” or “inconclusive.” In Fagan’s sample, 36 percent of the forms did not identify a suspected crime. “Furtive movements” or “high crime area” were checked off on 40 percent. Since only about 10 percent of stop-and-frisks led to a summons or an arrest (and even fewer to a conviction), the court was able to see a pattern of wrongful and needless stops that infringed on the rights of racial minorities. In August, Judge Shira Scheindlin of the Southern District of New York ruled the stop-and-frisk program unconstitutional and ordered immediate changes to it.

The road to this incredible civil rights victory, which de Blasio says he would let stand, was long and bloody. If the mayor-

elect drops the Bloomberg administration’s appeal of Judge Scheindlin’s decision, Bratton will nonetheless still need to fully implement her ruling, which requires some precincts to wear cameras to film civilian encounters for a one-year period. Scheindlin’s decision would impose a joint remedial process between CCR and the NYPD, to include two community meetings in each borough “to take the pulse of the community,” and to report back to her for possible further remedies.

Let’s hope for — but not assume — the best of intentions on the part of de Blasio and Bratton. We cannot allow this epic legal victory to be squandered by inaction.

Ann Schneider is a board member of the New York City chapter of the National Lawyers Guild. The views expressed in this article do not necessarily represent that of the Guild.

INHERIT

Continued from page 11

resisting pipelines, demanding renewable energy or organizing against the extraction of the tar sands. Meanwhile, youth are recognizing that it is up to us to amplify society’s response to climate change. We understand that it is the relationships we make with each other that will enable us to collaborate in building global resilience and ending our dependence on fossil fuels. After all, it’s our world to inherit. [The youth slogan at the failed 2009 Copenhagen talks was “How old will you be in 2050?”]

The night before the walkout, many of us gathered in the “convergence space” — an old, charming building where much of COP 19’s grassroots organizing took place — to plan it. It was clear at that point that no progress was going to be made, and the presence of the coal industry at the conference showed an almost absurd conflict of interest. We decided to symbolically step out of this year’s talks, sending a sign that we were temporarily giving up on the U.N. process in order to build grassroots momentum in our home countries and come back stronger at next year’s conference. By walking out, we were shifting the focus to people’s movements and collective action from the ground up.

2015 will be the most significant year yet for climate change. It is the year in which

scientists tell us global emissions must peak — that is, reach their highest point and begin to drop — if we are to avoid disastrous global warming. It is also the year in which politicians are expected to sign a new global agreement to tackle climate change. Those of us working to fix this crisis have exactly two years to step up our efforts and work strategically, which will inevitably mean that we — Big Greens, youth groups and every single person concerned about our future — will have to re-evaluate how we participate in the political process.

Walking out of the U.N. talks didn’t mean that we are abandoning international politics. Rather, when we walked out, we used the hashtag #Volveremos — in Spanish, *we will return*. We will gather our communities, and when we arrive at next year’s talks in Lima, and the 2015 talks in Paris, the collective action of millions of people will light a fire under the slow-moving political process, and — in the most radical dreams I dare to have — this bottom-up action will propel us to a world we can feel proud to inherit.

Anjali Appadurai is a climate justice advocate whose work has focused on the intersection between social movements and the U.N. Convention on Climate Change. She works with grassroots climate justice organizations in her native Vancouver and around the world.

CLIMATE CONF.

Continued from page 10

a setback as well, with industrialized nations that have been polluting since the mid-1800s reframing it to insist that less-developed countries cut their emissions at an “equal” rate.

Those who follow the U.N.’s annual climate conferences — this is the 19th so far — won’t be surprised that the outcome of negotiations in Warsaw was a further weakened foundation for a final agreement set to be voted on in 2015, which then has to be approved by the signatory countries, meaning it must get through the U.S. Congress. Americans get to compare notes with other countries next September during a side summit called by U.N. General Secretary Ban Ki Moon that will take place during the U.N. General Assembly.

Next year’s annual gathering of climate delegates, lobbyists, NGOs and press takes place in Latin America, and will unfold in two phases. While Peru hosts the actual summit, Venezuela will host a pre-COP dedicated largely to giving voice to civil society.

“We have been seeing this tendency to make this a business and market profit convention, sadly taking advantage of the pollution that some are causing,” said Claudia Salerno, the lead climate negotiator for Venezuela. “So, Venezuela next year will host the first formal social consultation of every single social movement involved in the climate change agenda. For the first time, instead of having ministers

listening to each other ... we are going to have [them] listen to their people about what is the kind of ambition and the kind of agreement the world wants to have.”

Renée Feltz is a producer at Democracy Now!.

ARCTIC 30 SPRUNG FROM RUSSIAN JAILS

Russia has granted bail to 28 Greenpeace activists and two freelance journalists arrested on the high seas September 19 while protesting at the first commercial offshore oil platform in the Arctic Ocean. Two of the activists attempted to scale the oil platform during the action.

Members of the Arctic 30 face prison terms of up to seven years on charges of hooliganism. As *The Independent* went to press, *BBC* reported that Russian President Vladimir Putin had submitted a draft amnesty plan to the Russian parliament that could free the Greenpeace activists.

The Arctic 30’s action took place at a time when Arctic sea ice is receding amid warming temperatures. The Arctic is believed to contain vast reserves of untapped oil and gas. This has attracted increasing interest from some of the world’s largest energy corporations as well as nations that border the Arctic Ocean, including Russia and the United States.

The protest took place at an offshore ice-resistant oil producing platform owned by Gazprom, Russia’s state-owned energy giant, which is collaborating on the project with Shell Oil. Drilling is scheduled to begin in 2014. Critics of Arctic drilling say it puts a pristine ecosystem at risk as oil spills in the Arctic’s stormy seas are inevitable and will prove impossible to clean up. They also say that accelerating drilling in the Arctic is the worst possible response to climate change.

“The ice is retreating and oil companies are moving north to drill for the same stuff that’s driving that melting in the first place,” Greenpeace said in a statement. “It’s madness.”

— JOHN TARLETON

REVEREND BILLY

Continued from page 10

yond the surface in front of us are the consequences of Chase’s bad investments over the years in fossil fuels.”

With humanity driving what scientists now consider to be the sixth mass extinction in the Earth’s history (the last one occurred 65 million years ago when an asteroid wiped out the dinosaurs), Reverend Billy told *The Independent* that his performance troupe will don a new animal totem in 2014, most likely the honeybee.

As pollinators, honeybees are essential to growing a wide array of foods. However, honeybee populations have been collapsing worldwide in recent years. Scientists blame a relatively new class of insecticides known as neonicotinoids that are now in widespread use. Research has shown that these chemicals suppress the honeybee’s

immune system. European authorities have taken actions to ban or limit their use. No such thing has occurred in the U.S.

Billy said he wants to take aim at agribusiness giant Monsanto — which sells both genetically modified seeds and the pesticides that must be applied to their crops — and the banks that fund it.

“Big Agriculture is as much a part of the climate change problem as coal-fired power plants,” Billy noted, pointing to the clearing of forestland for industrial-scale monocultures and the intensive use of petroleum-based pesticides and fertilizers that make such farming possible. “Drenching the Earth with chemicals to grow one plant is alarming,” he added.

For more information on banks that are financing climate change, see banktrack.org.

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and how our global food system
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ANARCHIST READING GROUP
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mutual aid in order to help realize
a society free of all forms of social
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STATES

INTERVIEW

Reliving the Radical '80s



TIMOTHY KRAUSE

REBEL VOICE: Steven Wishnia in his New York City apartment. He is the author of a new novel set in the 1980s rock scene, a prolific musician and journalist.

INTERVIEW BY ADAM JOHNSON

Steven Wishnia is a writer, a musician and a man of many dimensions. In the summer of 1980 he helped to found the leftist punk band False Prophets, which went on to release two albums as parts of the counterculture lashed out against the right-wing resurgence in Reagan-era America. Since then, Wishnia, 58, has become a journalist specializing in housing, labor and drug issues, a longtime Independent writer and, yes — a late-middle-aged leftie hit hard by the Great Recession.

In the fall of 2012 he published *When the Drumming Stops* (Manic D. Press), a fictional account of a punk band called the Gutter Astronomers, their navigation of the 1980s rock scene and their short reunion tour in the 2000s. Reminiscent of but far from identical to the real story of the False Prophets, the novel follows the band from their semi-glory days in the 1980s to the first decade of the 21st century — when they get hit hard by gentrification, cultural irrelevance, the economic fallout of the Great Recession and, most of all, the unavoidable passage of time.

ADAM JOHNSON: Prior to publishing *When the Drumming Stops*, you worked as a writer and editor for many publications. What motivated you to write a work of fiction?

STEVEN WISHNIA: Sometimes you can tell a deeper truth by making stuff up. In journalism and other nonfiction you can only go so far, because you can't really get into the heads of those you are writing about. You can only go off what they tell you and in memoir you have to stick to reality. So, fiction was just the best vehicle for getting inside these characters' heads and

conveying things that are connected to reality but not restricted by it.

Also, most music writing, either fiction or nonfiction, is basically celebrity journalism. I wanted to tell a story about people who were talented, but didn't get big — and what happens when they get older and are still trying to hold on to their souls.

AJ: So, what connection does the fictional reunion of the Gutter Astronomers have to the actual reunion of your old band, the False Prophets, in 2006?

SW: I never stopped playing music, and the experiences I've had doing that colored the story. But I actually started writing the book a year before the False Prophets did the reunion gig at CBGB. So it was more like life imitating art than me

writing about my experiences. Plus, the False Prophets reunion was a lot more acrimonious.

AJ: You were active in cultural and political scenes through the Reagan and Bush Jr. administrations and draw parallels between the two in your book. What similarities did you find to be the most striking?

SW: Reagan really turned the country around for the worse. He tore up the New Deal social contract — the idea that working people had the right to make a decent living — and replaced it with this free-market fundamentalism. We're still paying for that now.

The late 1970s were a little chaotic, the crime was high and it was pretty hard to find a job, but things were cheap. We thought \$300 for rent was a ripoff! When Reagan came in, conditions got

much harsher. You hardly ever saw homeless people in the street before 1981 and then all of a sudden they were all over. We in the hardcore punk scene were really pissed off about all that, but we weren't really connected to any political organization back then. We just fucking screamed.

What's happened in recent years is a more extreme version of what happened under Reagan, because you've had 30 years of erosion of people's ability to make a decent living and have a little freedom to play. I don't envy people in their twenties.

AJ: How did this recession change your life?

SW: I got laid off just before it began and have been freelancing ever since. I've been working since I was

The geographic details were from walking around the city. There is a scene when the character Tina is coming back from taking her kids to visit their aunt in Jackson Heights and there are Mexican boys in Nirvana T-shirts in the street — that's just from walking around and observing. I'd go to DIY shows in Bushwick where I would be the only person over 35; I would just watch the band and the crowd and take notes. Some of the landlord names are Yiddish insults. Once I was on the subway and saw someone reading a book on Islam that said "jaharram" means "unclean," and I thought, 'That would be a great name for a Muslim death-metal band.' So I e-mailed a friend, a former *Independent* photographer who had been in Afghanistan, and asked her what would be a good name for an Afghan lead singer. Stuff like that.

AJ: Looking back, what was most frustrating

about the hardcore music scene?

SW: I had a lot of problems with the hardcore punk subculture. It turned into a very narrow scene emotionally and musically. Much of the crowd was this weird mix of extremely politically correct leftists and thuggish right-wing skinheads. And the music was a lot more formulaic than what came out of the broader punk scene. There wasn't a single song that was as good as "Rockaway Beach." I was really frustrated when the False Prophets got stuck in that box, because we never really fit into it, but we could never really get out of that category.

But in the early 1980s, it was the only subculture that was saying, "Fuck you, Ronald Reagan, and the horseshit you rode in on." And there were some really good bands with a lot of energy and intensity. I'm proud of that.

AJ: What was the research process for writing the book like?

SW: A lot of it was from this combination of memory and fascination.

Puppetmaster

Peter Schumann: *The Shatterer*
QUEENS MUSEUM
through March 30, 2014

The first Bread & Puppet (B&P) production I ever saw was in the midst of New York City's annual Halloween parade. I don't remember what it was about, exactly, but it was both grandiose and humble, relating to the earth, the soil and the stages of life. At one point, I'm pretty sure two ghost-like puppets, with their doughy papier-mâché heads and looming bed sheet bodies, had sex and made a little puppet baby. More than anything, I remember that the show was easily the biggest, most unified, most committed piece of work in the parade, and it felt strange (in a good way) that I hadn't had to go and find this eerie, majestic piece of art — it had simply found me.

The simplest way to describe B&P is to say that they're a politically minded puppet-theater company. But that definition leaves out so much: the public spectacles in small towns as well as big cities; the experience of marching in a peace protest and looking up toward a giant, sal-low puppet face hovering over the procession on 20-foot stilts. B&P started in New York's Lower East Side in the early 1960s, but the troupe really took root on a patch of farmland in northern Vermont. That setting has allowed B&P to



"Peter Schumann: *The Shatterer*" (detail), Queens Museum, 2013.

thrive — along with providing an expansive space for puppet production and rehearsal, the location has hosted the thousands of people who have come to B&P's summertime spectacles over the years — and in 2013, the company celebrated its 50th year of seemingly ceaseless creativity.

icles." It's true: B&P has remained largely outside the purview of the mainstream art world (this particular exhibit notwithstanding), but has influenced generations of activists, puppeteers and do-it-yourselfers.

B&P is inseparable from the now 79-year-old Schumann, who has shaped the theater's work for decades. Born in 1934 and raised in a small German village, Schumann made his way to New York in the early 1960s.

By the time he turned 30, he had been up-close with the Third Reich, the Second World War, rural poverty and various strains of American counterculture. Schumann's singularly intense vision is maybe something of a paradox for the troupe: B&P seems to borrow a communal, collective approach from the back-to-the-land movement of the 1960s and '70s, but much of its effort goes in support of just one man's art. Then again, without that particular persona at its core, B&P would be, and likely will be, something very different. "The Shatterer," Schumann's current solo exhibition at

the Queens Museum, takes its name from A-bomb architect J. Robert Oppenheimer's conflicted, post-Hiroshima quoting of the *Bhagavad Gita*, a line translated as "Now, I am become death, the shatterer of worlds."

The exhibition imagines 15th- and 16th-century peasant uprisings, as glimpsed between layers of post-Occupy street theater, wartime atrocities, prehistoric art and Boschian infernos. Wizen faces droop to the floor while cardboard discs explode from the ceiling; calm, ashen death masks float over tiny, huddled, fleshy families, alongside what appear to be globby papier-mâché casts of the newborn Christ. Built mainly out of paper and house paint, the exhibition includes newly created pieces as well as repurposed bits from old B&P productions, some of them dating almost to the troupe's birth five decades ago. It speaks to Schumann's devotion that all these disparate items could be made to cohere as a single artwork.

Going back to their early shows about affordable housing and the Vietnam War, B&P has long since engaged with the politics of the moment. With textual references to "the 99%," cardboard cutouts of businessmen and wall drawings of fighter jets, "The Shatterer" makes a few nods towards the present, but it's not really about that. Rather than any sort of in-the-moment timeliness, perhaps the most radical, far-reaching aspect of Schumann's work is the undergirding ethos: using rough-



"Peter Schumann: *The Shatterer*" (work in progress). Queens Museum, 2013.

and-ready methods to explore the role of the individual caught in the struggle between war and peace, feast and famine, life and death. B&P productions are memorable not just because of their homespun constructs, but also because of their lumbering, ungainly grandeur; it's not just thanks to their liveliness, but also their writhing, haunted sense of morbidity.

As for the "bread" part of Bread & Puppet: they're serious about that. Troupe members regularly pass out free, homemade bread at their shows, and Schumann will be giving out bread several times at the Queens Museum. In the 1987 pamphlet *What Is Cheap Art?*, Schumann wrote that "art must be accessible like bread." Likening white bread to the "dessert-like stuff which fattened Louis XVI," Schumann posits that "the elitist art consumer must be provoked," just as "the fluffy white-bread-eaters" must be "challenged with rough old sourdough rye." B&P is famous for its maxim "Art is cheap!" but projects like "The Shatterer" get lodged in the brain not just because they're cheap, but because they're beautiful. Schumann's is a coarse, blistered sort of populism: his art is accessible, but that doesn't make it easy.

—MIKE NEWTON



View of Peter Schumann's studio in Glover, Vermont, 2013.

COURTESY QUEENS MUSEUM

COURTESY QUEENS MUSEUM

THE INDEPENDENT December 17, 2013–January 13, 2014 17

Apt. for Rent in Stench City

Hell's Kitchen and the Battle for Urban Space

By JOSEPH VARGA

MONTHLY REVIEW PRESS, 2013

The Great Rent Wars: New York, 1917–1929

By ROBERT FOGELSON

YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2013

Cities are car-clogged streets, high-rise buildings of concrete, steel and glass, subways, bridges, parks — the infrastructure of our spatial practice and daily routine. Our commutes are marked by the physical structure of the city. We emerge from an apartment house to briskly navigate a cracked sidewalk past a canyon of other buildings along the street and down the stairs into the subway.

Embedded in the daily commute, however, are a set of social relations that govern how the infrastructure functions in the lives of the city's citizens. The apartment building where you awoke was built either by turn-of-the-century Tammany Hall-supporting stone masons or a foreign-based private equity firm employing undocumented Mexi-



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OLD NEW YORK: Steam engine on 11th Ave. in turn-of-the-20th-century Hell's Kitchen, then one of the most crowded neighborhoods in the city.

can immigrants that installed glass panels 20 floors above street level. The subway booth worker is a unionized public sector employee who struck in 2005 and lives with three generations in the Queens bungalow she grew up in.

Power dynamics determine the social relations that decide rent due, wages and even citizenship. So who determines social relations and controls New York City? *Hell's Kitchen and the Battle for Urban Space* by Joseph Varga offers lessons for today by exploring who the power brokers were and how residents of Manhattan's West Side lived during the Progressive Era (1890s–1920s) — a period of social and political reform that sought to rid government of corruption and assimilate the unwashed immigrant masses in dominant Protestant middle-class values. While Varga's Hell's Kitchen is set 100 years in the past, he writes a spatial history of the neighborhood that reframes political reform, crime, urban planning and citizenship.

The “stench of manure [and] of fal” from slaughterhouse byprod-

ucts, dangerous low-paid dock work, overcrowded housing conditions and the threat of police and criminal violence marked life in Hell's Kitchen at the beginning of the 20th century. Varga writes that Progressive reformers and actual Hell's Kitchen residents (who were predominantly Irish immigrants and their offspring, as well as some African-Americans) both attempted to improve living conditions through economic and political activity. Progressive reformers straddled both the Republican and Democratic parties and emphasized an active public and private sector prescribing social remedies as public policy. Progressives utilized the newly “scientific” social sciences to bolster their efforts to make decent citizens out of impoverished immigrants packed in substandard tenement ghettos reminiscent of their homelands.

The Rockefeller family, for example, funded Hell's Kitchen settlement houses and reformist New York Governor Al Smith, originally a Tammany stalwart, supported early rent control. The streets in

Hell's Kitchen were paved with good intentions but many residents resented the settlement houses because of their restrictive rules and intrusive social services, and were lukewarm to the parks that spruced up the dock area. While Rockefeller pulled funding from his settlement house due to lack of interest, post-World War I rent control measures proved to be popular policies in the 1920s.

Hell's Kitchen provides a theoretical framework to understand the modern city, but Robert Fogelson's *The Great Rent Wars: New York, 1917–1929* delivers the real-politik.

It seems New Yorkers have always complained about the rent and it has always been difficult to find a decent apartment. In Fogelson's narrative some tenants resorted to sleeping in acrid boiler rooms and dank cellars. Those that found apartments huddled into them and feared exorbitant rent increases, a situation that eventually sparked the formation of tenant leagues and rent strikes. At protest marches, striking tenants declared they would maintain the buildings themselves, crying out, “the Bolsheviks are in control.”

Tenant concerns about soaring rents were matched by landlords' fear of creeping socialism. Tenant leagues proliferated, advocating

rent control (and winning the first rent control laws in 1920), and the Socialist Party gained seats in the State Assembly. In addition to overcrowded apartments, tenants filled housing courts to capacity, hoping to get a tenant-friendly judge to ward off rent hikes and evictions. *Rent Wars* prominently features the law, as judges largely were the arbiters of rental disputes and though the book painstakingly lays out the constitutional battles over rent control, there are amusing tales of courtroom and apartment house donnybrooks.

Rent control expired in 1929 but reappeared as price controls during World War II and still covers almost one million city apartments. Rent laws — which are set by the state legislature — have been greatly weakened in the past two decades and many New Yorkers now fork over more than half their monthly income in rent. Fogelson's book reminds us that rent control is a remedy to a chronic housing shortage but laws that are made can be unmade. Like in the 1920s, the city's population is set to increase further, compounding the housing shortage all the while Albany seems content to allow rent regulations to phase out.

— BENNETT BAUMER

Mayor 1%

Mayor 1%: Rahm Emanuel and the Rise of Chicago's 99%

By KARI LYDERSEN

HAYMARKET BOOKS, 2013

New Yorkers rejoicing in Michael Bloomberg's departure from office can be grateful for another small favor: they don't live in Chicago, where residents are stuck for at least two more years with an austerity-mad, street-brawling mayor who wields near absolute power over a City Council far more supine than the one we have here.

Bloomberg, the billionaire CEO, is rarely abusive in public. He speaks well of the city even as he helps friends pick its pocket. When defending neocolonial police action in communities of color, he doesn't gloat about it — at least not within earshot of the press. Chicago's sharp-elbowed Mayor Rahm Emanuel is more like the schoolyard bully who brazenly steals your lunch and gives it to the rich kids. Think of him as Bloomberg's nasty little brother. Same pedigree. Different tack.

Kari Lydersen's timely *Mayor*



ROTATING FRAME/FICKER

NOT MY MAYOR: Protesters descended on Rahm Emanuel's house on July 4 to decry his austerity policies.

1%: Rahm Emanuel and the Rise of Chicago's 99% exhaustively traces the rise of Emanuel, a one-time Clintonista, former congressman and Obama consigliere whose mayoral victory in 2011 changed politics in Chicago from a machine-dominated satrapy where city unions had some small influence to an autocracy where community services were drained, unions frozen out or broken and city workers bludgeoned.

Like Bloomberg, Emanuel drastically cut library hours. He privatized

jobs — including cleaning services at O'Hare airport, which were then taken over by funders of Emanuel's election campaign. As with Bloomberg, he closed schools that needed help and even has his own anti-terrorism Keystone Kops unit, which played a key role in uprooting the local Occupy encampment.

Unlike Mike, he liquidated community-based mental health programs. These and other policies sparked a grassroots rebellion that has driven down his approval ratings to as low as 19 percent and clouded his 2015 re-election prospects. It has become clear to Emanuel's growing ranks of opponents that, as one protester told Lydersen, “It's not a question of whether the city is broke. It's a question of who the city thinks is valuable.”

CHICAGO POLITICS

Despite its tradition of labor and community radicalism, Chicago politics has never been dominated by reformers. It's also been racially and ethnically abrasive, with the color line cutting through Chicago politics in ways that make New York's look like a Quaker meeting. There, as here, the finance, insurance and real estate sector (FIRE) calls the shots.

Lydersen's exposé of the mayor

as an arrogant bully is perfect, and she succeeds brilliantly in setting the stage for the big question: if Rahm Emanuel (and by extension Bloomberg) do palpable harm, whose interests do they help? To a degree she makes the case. She shows Emanuel in his days as a top congressional Democrat playing footsie with the later-to-be-disgraced heads of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, the government-sponsored mortgage giants that played a key role in fueling the housing price bubble that preceded the 2008 economic crash. She also covers his unwholesome relationship with a host of investment firms and his nefarious role as head of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee in axing viable progressive candidates. It's a hefty indictment. I'd vote guilty.

What the book doesn't do is more tightly and instrumentally connect Emanuel to local and national corporate elites. With the Chicago area home to 25 of the Fortune 500 top corporations, just five are mentioned, and only United Airlines prominently. The other four are covered mostly in passing as incidental beneficiaries of the mayor's largesse. The agenda-setting City Club of Chicago and its grantees are mentioned once.

Still, it's one book, and it clears

the ground for others. There's also no need to claim a one-to-one relationship between corporate needs and government policy. Often corporations disagree, or have conflicting interests, and the state has to play arbiter. It will be helpful if Lydersen's work stimulates others to explore the concrete relationships between city politics, public policy and business elites. If, as Marx argued, government functions as the executive committee of the ruling class, then how this executive body functions in practice needs exposing in great detail.

Sadly, no one has skewered Bloomberg with great investigative reportage as Jack Newfield and Wayne Barrett once did with Ed Koch and Rudy Giuliani. Some 800 miles to our west, Lydersen points the way with a terrific muckraking tale of palpable harm to the people of Chicago by a smirking prince of the Democratic Party's neoliberal Wall Street wing. Lydersen's exposé is a slam dunk about who's not empowered, who's fighting back and why. It should provide a useful point of reference in judging the direction of the new de Blasio administration.

—MICHAEL HIRSCH

Downhome Mexican Folk Tunes

BY DAVID MEADOW

For people who like really bare-bones, traditional folk music the way it was played before drum sets and synthesizers, Radio Jarocho will hit the spot. This ensemble plays the classic *son jarocho* music of southern Veracruz, Mexico, ostensibly with some of their own additions but certainly no concessions to modern schlock or annoying novelty. It's a light, dry, brightly-colored cocktail, refreshing in its simplicity. Radio Jarocho pulled a big crowd into Barbès, a performance space and bar in Brooklyn, on Saturday, December 7, and had plenty of feet stamping and necks craning.

The down-home glow of the band's core sound is achieved with a few vocals; two or three stringed instruments, depending on the performance; shoes clogging on a small, portable stage called a *tarima*; and a *marimbola*, a sort of giant thumb piano of Afro-Caribbean origin, which offers the rather unusual complement of bass notes plucked from long metal tongues. What's neat about this strand of *son jarocho* is that percussive dance is an integral part of the sound. The group is also not opposed to bringing a few friends up to the stage to raise the dance factor or thicken the sound with a traditional percussion instrument like a donkey's jawbone, whose teeth rattle when the bone is struck and rasp like a cabaña when they're rubbed directly. The tunes, by and large, are either rollicking without being overstimulating or serenely dreamy without being precious.

Julia del Palacio is the real utility player of the group, handling clogging, vocals, announcements and the occasional hand drum. String duties on Saturday went to Juan Carlos Marín on the *requinto*, a solo nylon-string instrument, and Emmanuel Huítzil on the *jarana*, a strummed one (both number among the eight zillion cousins of the guitar). The string players do most of the singing in this group, and these two men get a good blend going when they harmonize. Huítzil's voice is the mellower one and Marín's is thinner and rawer — even astringent at times — but indeed it appears to be typical of the genre if one can acquire a taste for it.

What fascinated me most was probably Francisco Martínez's steady thrumming on the *marimbola*. It's about as strong and deep a bass as a *guitarrón* (that massive acoustic bass guitar in full-scale mariachi bands), and, indeed, some

flavors of *son jarocho* use a *guitarrón* or the similar *leona*. The *marimbola*'s warmth and fullness are plenty to ground the string instruments and propel the rhythm of the songs. Indeed, a big bonus is that it doubles as a percussion box out of which a skilled player can coax notes of varying pitch, snap and depth. Martínez doesn't seem to play the tongues and the wood at the same time, but someone's probably going to try it sooner or later.

One off-the-wall moment occurred when del Palacio exhorted the audience to make a huge fuss over the opening statement of one song (I'm guessing said opener is to *son jarocho* aficionados what the first chords of "Start Me Up" or "Smells Like Teen Spirit" are to rock devotees, though I don't know that many *son jarocho* aficionados were actually there). Anyway we obliged gamely, but ended up drowning it out so we didn't know what we were cheering for before or

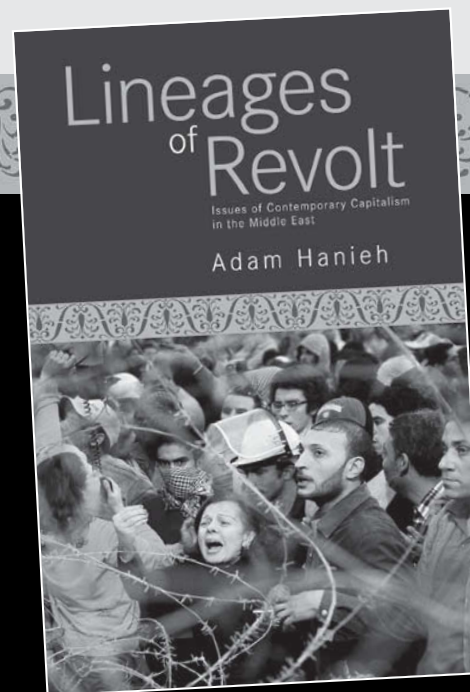
after it occurred. Still, it was all in a spirit of good fun, and the show went on as before, with more of the singer-dancer's genial commentary on the material. The group plays its share of *son jarocho* standards, including "La Bamba" — yep, this is where Richie Valens and Los Lobos got it from — but I was surprised to hear del Palacio mention that a tune called "Oaxaca" is Radio Jarocho's original. Hearing the zest and flair deep in the muscle memory of the players, and the unison shouts of the city's name that bookended the song in a timeless gesture of pride for one's region, I was quite easily tricked into thinking that the venerable Traditional/Anonymous had penned this entry.

While there are no upcoming shows listed on the band's website as this goes to press, a quick glance at "past shows" will attest that the group is playing in Brooklyn, or occasionally another borough, quite often — so keep your eyes peeled.



TALENTED: Julia del Palacio of Son Jarocho performing recently in Brooklyn.

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